

PRESS RELEASE

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PHILIPPINE EMBASSY IN BRUSSELS OFFICIALLY OPENS OVERSEAS ABSENTEE VOTING



Philippine Ambassador to the European Communities Cristina G. Ortega officially opens the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) in Belgium during a Filipino Mass on 15 April 2007 in the port city of Antwerp.

19 April 2007 – Philippine Ambassador to Belgium Cristina G. Ortega reported to the Department of Foreign Affairs that the Embassy officially opened the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) in Belgium during a Filipino Mass on 15 April 2007 in the port city of Antwerp.

The OAV in Belgium started on 14 April 2007, the official date designated by the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) as the start of absentee voting. This year's OAV is the second one conducted by the COMELEC in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs.

In her message, Ambassador Ortega encouraged everyone to vote and let their voices be heard in the selection of the Philippines' national leaders. "Filipinos overseas are an important segment in our political decision-making process and even if they are far away, they should take the opportunity to participate in our national affairs. By doing so, they meaningfully contribute to forging a lasting democracy in our country," she said.

Leaflets on the postal voting procedures and the list of candidates were distributed after the Mass to some 300 Filipinos with their families and friends. Embassy officials also responded to questions raised by the Filipino community.

Similar outreach programs informing the general Filipino community in Belgium about the Overseas Absentee Voting process were conducted in other cities of the country. During the 9th anniversary celebration of Filipiniana-Europa in Louvain, the Embassy encouraged the registered Filipino voters to exercise their right to vote and briefed them of the new procedures relating to postal voting. On 14 April, the Embassy also attended an event conducted by Council of Filipino Associations in Belgium (COFAB), one of the largest Filipino community organizations in Belgium, to brief its members of the OAV exercise.

Ambassador Ortega said, "The Embassy has arranged a schedule to enable Filipinos all over Belgium, especially those who wish to personally deliver their accomplished ballots, to come to the Embassy even on weekends. The Embassy is open on Saturdays and Sundays from April 14 to May 14, 2007 to receive ballots from the Filipino voters."

The Philippine Embassy in Brussels has scheduled with the Philippine Chaplaincy in Antwerp to conduct absentee voting for registered Filipino seafarers who dock at the Antwerp port. Fr. Jorgedy Bago, head of the Philippine Chaplaincy, is connected with the Antwerp Seafarers Center and maintains close coordination with the city's Port Authority in determining ships docking at the port containing Filipino crew.

Antwerp is the second largest port in Europe, next only to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. END



Some 300 Filipinos with their families and friends attend the Filipino Mass in Antwerp on 15 April 2007 as the Embassy officially opened the Overseas Absentee Voting (OAV) in Belgium.